DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 239 691 JC 840 067

AUTHOR Libby, Richard M.
TITLE TRACES: An Economic Model That Works.
PUB DATE 4 Dec 83
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Conference of the American Vocational Association, Technical Education Division (Anaheim, CA, December 4, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agency Cooperation; *Community Development; *Cooperative Programs; School Business Relationship; *Small Businesses; Technical Assistance
IDENTIFIERS *Training Research Assistance Cooperative Ext Serv

ABSTRACT

The Training, Research, and Assistance Cooperative Extension Service (TRACES) was formed to provide a central source of technical and training resources, knowledge, and avenues of government funding for the benefit of businesses and small to mid-sized industries in southeastern Ohio. The 16 organizations involved in TRACES are educational institutions, government agencies, and chambers of commerce in a five-county area. TRACES has brought greater productivity to the region in the areas of training, research, and technical assistance through activities such as the following: TRACES provided for faculty assistance and state funding for a manufacturer of automobile parts that had to improve quality control to remain competitive; arranged for a metallurgist to solve an auto parts manufacturer's problem with weld breakages; and helped arrange for a supply of solvents needed by a community action agency to separate copper from the material in which it had been clad. TRACES has been accepted by business and by state government leaders concerned with the flow of government services and has received an award from the Ohio Board of Regents for developing business, industry, government, and educational linkages. (HB)

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TRACES: AN ECONOMIC MODEL THAT WORKS

Dr. Richard M. Libby, President
Muskingum Area Technical College
Zanesville, Ohio

Remarks presented to a Conference of the American Vocational Association, Technical Education Division, in Anaheim, Calif.

December 4, 1983

JC 840 067

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Remarks by Dr. Libby to the American Vocational Association, Technical Education Division at Anaheim, California, December 4, 1983.

10/4/83

TRACES: AN ECONOMIC MODEL THAT WORKS

In southeastern Ohio, the letters T-R-A-C-E-S mean something of special utility to businesses and small industries. TRACES represents an amalgamation of 16 educational institutions, government agencies and chambers of commerce throughout a five-county area.

TRACES is the acronym for Training, Research, and Assistance Cooperative Extension Service. It brings together technical and training resources, knowledge, and avenues for government funding into one central source.

The one-source-for-many-types-of-assistance concept is not a new one. The Cooperative Extension Service has done this for farmers for years. The specialized needs of the farmer can almost always be satisfied at the Cooperative Extension Service.

But what about the businessman and the manager of the small-to-mid-sized industry -- the ones too small to afford their own research and development departments? Specialized knowledge and services are frequently available to them -- somewhere. Perhaps they are buried in some obscure office of a state agency, perhaps in one of the massive data banks of a large university, perhaps in the writings or the memory of some research specialist in a faraway city.

As for funding, the small businessman or industry manager frequently can qualify for help with employee training and other types of government aid. But where does he find it? Funding avenues are perhaps more obscure and more difficult than are those used to gain access to the results of research. And almost invariably the agencies and the application procedures are so bound in red tape that the pursuit of government funding requires expert guidance.

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The formation of TRACES was based on the fact that there are many services already available to the businessman, but there is nothing simple about finding them or using them. Some agencies offer free information. Some institutions offer educators to help in training new employees or retraining current ones to meet the demands of developing technology. Some agencies provide funding for training or funding for various methods of increasing productivity. Still others provide specialized counseling which could be helpful if the businessman knows who gives it and how to get it.

Keep in mind that all these government services have been bought and paid for. Tax dollars have already been spent to organize, staff and equip hundreds upon hundreds of offices. They are there waiting for any business manager to use. The trouble is that business managers don't have time to even find out the names of the agencies that could serve them. It would be a rare manager who could afford that kind of time -- not to mention the patience required to wade through the red tape attached to gaining such information.

Coupled to these problems is another which has been created by government agencies themselves in their attempt to bring services to busy managers. When throngs of representatives of these agencies, each offering a valuable, but highly specialized service, call on business managers one at a time it creates a traffic problem. Managers simply can't afford the time to meet with all the agency people sent out to sell their services.

So the TRACES idea was born: the bringing together of several institutions or offices offering similar services. The Ohio Job Training Consortium is an example. Funded by the Ohio Economic and Community Development Office, the Job Training Consortium serves as a single-point information source for businesses that need help with job training. Another consortium active in Ohio is

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the Ohio Technology Transfer Organization -- OTTO, for short. OTTO is the grouping of 11 of Ohio's two-year colleges and The Ohio State University. Its purpose is to bring access to the information, advice and services that increase productivity and result in economic development for the state.

Before the formation of TRACES, there was a confusing array of services available locally, available in Columbus, Washington, the west coast and many points between.

What was clearly called for was an organization of organizations -- a funnel, so to speak, that would bring all those agencies and the knowledge of their resources together at one point. What was needed was a web that encompassed them and allowed them to be tapped at a single source. And that is precisely what TRACES is.

I was not the only one to recognize this need. But I felt strongly about it. So I sat down with a few others who shared this view. There were chamber of commerce executives, JVS superintendents, university and college deans, Ohio Bureau of Employment Services leaders and others. We discussed the possibilities and the likely success of such a project. They were as enthused as I was and we decided we would work together until it was accomplished.

Gradually, TRACES came together. Agencies and institutions from throughout the area were enthusiastic about the idea. State officials quickly offered their support and agreed to participate. The web of TRACES blossomed. The funnel of TRACES expanded until it incorporated 16 points from which businesses and industries could receive aid. They included one university, one liberal arts college, two technical colleges, three chambers of commerce, two joint vocational schools, The Muskingum Employment and Training Office, The Ohio Bureau of Employment Services, The Ohio Board of Regents, The Ohio Bureau of

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Vocational Rehabilitation, Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association, The State Department of Vocational Education, and The Ohio Department of Economic and Community Development.

Muskingum Area Technical College provides office space to TRACES, and serves as agency headquarters. Each of the above-mentioned entities has a representative on the board of directors and I am honored to serve as the board's chairman. It gives me another outlet for bringing whatever is available at Muskingum Area Technical College to the people of the community.

TRACES is now in its second year, and I am very happy to report that it is working. From the time when the organizational structure was erected and we announced the service, response from the business community has been overwhelming. TRACES has been fully accepted as a partner in area economic development and has been called upon consistently for various types of services. The number of our success stories is far too great to even list for you today. But I would like to give you a few examples of ways in which TRACES has brought greater productivity to southeastern Ohio. They are in the areas of training, research and technical assistance.

The first example concerns the ITT Higbie Manufacturing Company of New Lexington, Ohio, which makes small steel-tubing automobile parts such as gasoline lines, brake lines, diesel injector tubes and similar products. Technical problems arose for this company when U.S. automakers began demanding improved quality of products from their suppliers.

The choice for ITT Higbie was simple: It could begin meeting some new, close-tolerance specifications -- or it could go out of business. The former alternative, which they chose, required application of statistical quality control. As you know, this is a complex set of concepts that requires a

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thorough training of all employees, beginning with supervisory personnel. TRACES was contacted for help.

Our assistance was in two forms. First, we arranged for a faculty member of Muskingum Area Technical College to conduct the training program for 30 salaried employees. Second, we arranged for state funding, which paid nearly half the cost.

The ITT Higbie case is an excellent example of the way we work, because not only was TRACES the coordinating agency, but it managed to bring the resources of the state and a two-year technical college together to aid in the survival of a southeastern Ohio industry which provides 130 jobs.

The second example is one that concerns the TRACES research function. This one is a case involving another auto parts manufacturer. This one fabricates floor mats which use a wire frame on the outside edges. A metalurgical problem in the weld where the two ends of the frame meet resulted in breakage on the welds. The manufacturer called the TRACES representative who arranged for a metalurgist from NASA to analyze and solve the problem. The result? A new marketable product being manufactured in southeastern Ohio.

The final example concerns technical assistance. A community action agency has been given access each week to 100,000 pounds of scrap, 17 percent of which is copper. The trouble was that this copper is clad in circuit-board material which somehow has to be separated from the copper. TRACES came up with the supplier of solvents to do the job. The result is a new half-million-dollar business which allows a community action agency to become self-supporting, create more jobs and salvage industry waste.

Our list of such triumphs is long and genuine. We helped a businessman turn nearly useless sawdust into a profit-making sweeping compound. We came to the aid of a foundry with a thermocouple burnout problem. Tapping NASA's

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computer network produced a supplier for a thermocouple which could be replaced on one-month intervals, thus saving the company more than $11,000 annually.

Recently, an out-of-state manufacturer was considering moving part of its operation to Ohio. Among the sites under consideration was a city in the TRACES service district. Working with the local chamber of commerce, TRACES helped represent the advantages of the local area. Our representative located state funds to conduct on-site training for the new employees. She contacted and coordinated the assistance available from the CETA Job Training Office, the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services and the local joint vocational school. Such a package greatly influenced the company's decision to make the move and bring 80 new jobs to our area.

These are the kinds of problems we deal with and these are the types of small businesses we serve. We have been widely accepted by the business community and by those in Ohio government who are concerned with the flow of government services to users of those services.

The Ohio Board of Regents made an award for public service to the TRACES organization last December, recognizing its work as an outstanding example of business, industry, government and education linkages. It commended TRACES as a model upon which similar regional agencies might be formed.

I view the work of TRACES as a needed service to many factions. As southeastern Ohio grows, many new, small businesses will be established. As technology grows more complex and as government services expand, the need for a single-point-of-contact agency as a connector can only intensify.

TRACES has been in operation long enough to prove that it is a viable, effective and efficient system. Its services are important to many. I can claim credit for contributing to the development of southeastern Ohio. It is, in short, an economic model that works.

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ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
8118 Math-Sciences Building
University of California
Los Angeles, California 90024
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